Iamblichus's Theory of divination (μαντική) and Divine inspiration (θεία ἐπίπνοια): Nature and the Case of Hydromancy at Claros

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Iamblichus, along with mystery cults that were spreading in Late Antique Meditteranea, theorized various types of μαντική in the second part of his De Mysteriis, that one can categorize in two distinct groups: those belonging to inductive techniques such as augury and the interpretation of σύμβολα on the one hand, and those caused by divine inspiration: θεία ἐπίπνοια, θεία μανία and ἐνθουσιασμός on the other hand.

His exposition focuses on the mechanisms and causes of the latter, which play a major part in theurgical technique, as he delivers a scientific analysis of the phenomenon of possession (κατοκωχῆ). According to Iamblichus, the purpose of μαντική is the prophet's (μάντις) soul's union (ἐνοσις) with the divine, which result in a πρόγνωσις of the future and enables the soul to temporarily free itself from its spatio-temporal limits while still in its mortal body. And as such, this experience seems to be of the utmost sotereriological value. However, from a philosophical point of view, it seriously challenges Iamblichus's theology, and most of all, the status of divinity in regards to nature. Indeed, if the gods are transcendent in an ontological and hierarchical sense, which would prevent the very possibility of their union with a human soul, they are immanent throughout their presence and illuminations of the cosmos. But if it is so, are they to divinize the prophet's soul or is it meant to remain their mere instrument?

2 See P. Athanassiadi, Païens et chrétiens dans un âge d'angoisse, Belles Lettres, 2010.
Iamblichus, guided by his characteristic will to organize and systematize religious *phenomena*, introduces various degrees of θεία ἐπίπνοια and κατοκωκή, classified by level of intensity and union with the divine. While stressing the difference between the causes and the symptoms of divinatory inspiration, Iamblichus insists on its most important sign: the descent of a πνεῦμα made of immaterial and noetic fire into the prophet.

Nevertheless, in divinatory inspiration, this gradual union with the divine doesn't seem to be an abduction: the god does not take the oracle, but comes to him, visits him, which results in his soul's αναγωγή, a feature that differentiates it from theurgical ascent, where the soul ascends on its ὀχήμα πνεῦμα during the god's descent. The steps of the deity's descent raise the so-called debate between Plotinus and Iamblichus about the soul's complete or partial descent: if the soul has fully fallen, which means that no part of it remains “above”, it can't reunite with its celestial part without going ritually through the whole realm of generation. This necessity leads us to highlight the importance of hydromancy in Iamblichus's theorization of μαντική, since he intends to both conserve water's sacredness and deny the natural or demonic causes of κατοκωκή.

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5 See H. Lewy, *Chaldean Oracles and Theurgy* op. cit. p. 170-171; 210; 413 and 414 for the steps of theurgical ascent.
8 Despite this important opposition between Plotinus and Iamblichus, see Iamblichus's f. 34, *In Timaeum* book 2 II, in J. Dillon, *Iamblichus, the Platonic Commentaries*, 2009, p. 137 where he seems to have accused Porphyry of being un-plotinian (μὴ πλωτίνριον), “being in agreement with Plotinus himself” according to Proclus. Therefore Iamblichus and Plotinus at least agreed on the intellegible paradigms (τὰ νοητὰ τοῦ κόσμου παραδείγματα) of the cosmos' pre-existence over nature. See also ibid. p. 307-309 for discussion.
Therefore, to what extent does Iamblichus succeed in maintaining both the divine's immanence and transcendence? How does he account for the causes of divine inspiration? How does θεία ἐπίπνοια result in divination, and foreknowledge of the future (πρόγνωσις)? Last but not least, what arguments does Iamblichus develop to justify the specific case of hydromancy, which leads him to accept nature as part of the sacred, and yet maintain the divine's transcendence?

This study will first focus on the common metaphysical ground Iamblichus wishes to provide all types of θεία ἐπίπνοια, and shall afterwards address the case of a hydromantic oracle (χρησμος): Claros (Colophon) in Asia Minor, in order to study Iamblichus's arguments in favor and against the power of water in the oracle's inspiration.

Degrees and types of divine inspiration

Iamblichus, in De Mysteriis, III, wishes to provide a scientific and organized account of the forms and degrees of θεία ἐπίπνοια:

"Εστι δὴ οὖν πολλὰ τῆς θείας κατοκωχῆς εἴδη καὶ πολλαχῶς ἡ θεία ἐπίπνοια ἀνακινεῖται, ὅθεν δὴ καὶ πολλὰ τὰ σημεῖα αὐτῆς ἐστι καὶ διαφέροντα. Τοῦτο μὲν γὰρ οἱ θεοὶ διαφέροντες, ἂφ' ὅν ἐπιπνεόμεθα, καὶ τὴν ἐπίπνοιαν ποιοῦσιν ἔτεραν, τοῦτο καὶ ὁ τρόπος τῶν ἐνθουσιασμῶν παραλλάττων ποιεῖ καὶ τὴν θεοφορίαν ἔτεραν. Ἡ γὰρ ὁ θεὸς ἡμᾶς ἔχει, ἢ ἡμεῖς ὅλοι τοῦ θεοῦ γιγνόμεθα, ἢ κοινὴ ποιοῦμεθα πρὸς αὐτὸν τὴν ἐνέργειαν καὶ ποτὲ μὲν τῆς ἐσχάτης δυνάμεως τοῦ θεοῦ μετέχουμεν, ποτὲ δ' αὖ τῆς μέσης, ἔνιοτε δὲ τῆς πρώτης· καὶ ποτὲ μὲν μετουσία ψιλῆ γίγνεται, ποτὲ δὲ καὶ κοινωνία, ἐνίοτε δὲ καὶ ἔνωσις τούτων τῶν ἐνθουσιάσεων·

There are, therefore, many kinds of divine possession (πολλὰ τῆς θείας κατοκωχῆς εἴδη), and divine inspiration (θεία ἐπίπνοια) is aroused in many ways. Hence, there are indeed many different signs of it. For, on the one hand, the gods by whom we are inspired are different and produce diverse inspiration; on the
other hand, the manner of enthusiasm in its alterations makes the divine possession also different (τῶν ἐνθουσιασμῶν παραλλάττων ποιεῖ καὶ τὴν θεοφορίαν ἑτέραν).

For either the god possesses us (ὁ θεὸς ἡμᾶς ἔχει), or we become wholly the god’s property (ἡμεῖς ὅλοι τοῦ θεοῦ γιγνόμεθα), or we exercise our activity in common with him (κοινὴν ποιούμεθα πρὸς αὐτὸν τὴν ἐνέργειαν). And sometimes we share in the god’s lowest power (τῆς ἐσχάτης δυνάμεως), sometimes in his intermediate (τῆς μέσης), and sometimes in his primary power (τῆς πρῶτης). And sometimes there is a mere presence (παρουσία), sometimes a communion (κοινωνία), and sometimes even a union (ἐνωσις).

According to Iamblichus, divination is indeed a category of θεία μανία. As a result of this statement, the first issue he has to face is the nature of divine inspiration: is it natural or supernatural? And if it is indeed supernatural, why does nature seem to play a part in it? Before addressing this delicate matter, Iamblichus sets up a general and systematic theory of enthusiasm he will further use in all his observations on religious experience.

He asserts that “divine possession is neither the accomplishment of the body nor of the soul, nor of both together, nor do these contain in themselves some cause of divine alteration, nor is it the nature of the greater to be generated from the inferior,” and that “the gift of foreknowledge” is “sent down by the gods”. This gift is “advantageous to souls for saving (σώζει) and leading them upwards (ἀνάγει)”.

Unlike Plutarch in his De Defectu Oraculorum who...
mentions demonic intervention in μαντική, Iamblichus insists on the gods as the only cause of θεία ἐπίπνοια, excluding by all means any intervention of inferior supernatural beings.

Foreknowledge, according to Iamblichus, would directly derive “from the gods who in themselves possess the limits of all knowledge of existing things, from whom the mantic power is distributed throughout the whole cosmos, and among all the different natures found there18”.

Another striking feature of Iamblichus's theorization of divine inspiration is the difference between θεία ἐπίπνοια and κατοκωχή. Although they seem at first equal, the latter is the result, or effect of the first. Therefore, divine inspiration is prior to the phenomenon of possession as its very consequence.

Iamblichus encompasses both in the general category of ἐνθουσιασμός, which literally means to be in a god (ἔνθεος), whose mode may vary according to the deity who inspires it. Therefore, enthusiasm is the very phenomenon of manifestation of the deity through the oracle, which can be separated in several types of trance, and several corresponding symptoms or signs19.

Of utmost importance is the capacity of the soul to act in common with the god, at the highest level of κατοκωχή. This single and common activity between the soul and the god highly contrasts with the multiplicity of his powers. To put it in other words, according to the power we share in, the lowest, the intermediate or the first and highest, the degree of union between the oracle's soul and the god varies until it culminates in ecstatic ἐνωσις, although Iamblichus stresses that this state of trance is not a mere frenzy, but an “exaltation and transference to what is superior20” (ἐπὶ τὸ κρεῖττον ἀναγωγὴ καὶ μετάστασις).

Let us now review the different stages of the soul's common ἐνέργεια with the deity which descends upon it. The very presence of the god

the causative means and power which they employ to make the prophetic priests and priestesses possessed by inspiration and able to present their visions. For it is not possible to hold that the desertion by the demons is the reason for the silence of the oracles unless we know precisely the manner in which the demons, by having the oracles in their charge and by their presence there, make them active and articulate.)

18 DM op. cit. III,1 p. 121.
19 For these symptoms, which are all related to ritually induced physical anaesthesia, see DM III,4 p. 128-131.
20 See DM III,7 p. 135
causes the soul to participate in his lowest power. In this first case, which seems to correspond to visions, the divine spirit and the oracle's soul are separated, each of them conserving their individuality. When the soul achieves a κοινωνία with the deity, it participates in its intermediate power. The supreme level of enthusiasm results in the soul's unification with the deity in accordance with its participation and its nature. In Apuleius's *Metamorphoses*, XI, Lucius's vision of Isis culminates in his ἱερός γάμος with the goddess, although it does not involve common πρόγνωσις, but the very glimpse from the soul's future postmortem condition, as a consequence of the temporary remembrance of its divine essence.

According to Iamblichus, this blissful trance is bound to purify the luminous vehicle of the soul through the oracle's complete loss of self-consciousness\(^2\), as the prophet symmetrically becomes the vehicle of the gods\(^2\):

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πάρεστι δ' εὐθὺς καὶ χρῆται ὡς ὀργάνῳ τῷ προφήτῃ οὗτε ἑαυτοῦ ὅντι οὔτε παρακολουθοῦντι οὐδὲν ὁ ἧς λέγει ἢ ὕπον γῆς ἐστιν· ὅστε καὶ μετὰ τὴν χρησμῷδιαν μόνης ποτὲ ἑαυτὸν λαμβάνει.
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(The divine pneuma) uses the prophet as an instrument (ὡς ὀργάνῳ τῷ προφήτῃ) while he is neither himself nor has any consciousness (οὔτε παρακολουθοῦντι) of what he says or where on the earth he is, so that even after prophesying, he sometimes scarcely gets control of himself.\(^2\)

\(^2\) For this complete loss of self-consciousness during enthusiasm see also DM op. cit. III,4 p. 129: “In this area also, I want to make clear the characteristic signs (τὰ τεκμήρια) of those who are truly possessed by the gods (τῶν ὀρθῶς κατεχομένων ὑπὸ τῶν θεῶν παραδείξεια). For if they have subjected their entire life as a vehicle or instrument (ὡς ὄχημα ἢ ὀργάνον) to the gods who inspire them, either they exchange their human life for the divine, or they direct their own life towards the god. They neither act according to sensation, nor are they awake in the manner of those who have their senses aroused; neither do they themselves apprehend the future, nor are they moved like those who act according to purpose. But they are not even conscious of themselves (οὐδὲ παρακολουθοῦσιν ἑαυτοῖς) neither as they were before, nor in any other fashion, nor, in general, do they turn (ἐπιστρέφουσιν εἰς ἑαυτοὺς) their personal intelligence upon themselves, nor do they project any personal knowledge.”


\(^{23}\) DM III,11 p. 147.
This phenomenon has been widely documented by anthropological research on possession cults and trance\textsuperscript{24}, which helped us get a better understanding of the mechanisms of divination in the ancient world, especially at Delphi\textsuperscript{25}. An interesting parallel has been drawn between hellenic institutional divination and the modern Nechung oracle, Tibet's state oracle\textsuperscript{26} who would “collapse into unconsciousness\textsuperscript{27}” at the end of his trance. The signs of possession are the same Iamblichus describes\textsuperscript{28}. In modern language, they can be described as peculiar


\textsuperscript{26} Similar to the pawo (dpa.'bo) are the lha-pa and klu-pa, also possessed by minor divinities of local cults. R. Stein, \textit{Tibetan Civilization}, Faber, London, 1972 p. 188, quoted by H. Sidky, “The State Oracle of Tibet, Spirit Possession and Shamanism”, Numen 58 (2011), Brill, p. 71-99 ; p. 79, writes that “There are mediumistic specialists who incarnate minor deities and belong, in spite of their Lamaist dress, to the nameless religion of the people. These are shepherds, who have on some occasion been “chosen” by a deity and from then on have been able to embody him. They go into a trance and sing, but they only incarnate local gods, gods of the sky (Iha) and the underworld (klu), gods of the soil, etc. From these they get their name: lha-pa, klu-pa.” See also W. Geoffrey Arnott, “Nechung: a modern parallel to the Delphic oracle?”, \textit{Greece & Rome}, vol. 36, p. 152-157 (1989) and H.R.H. Prince Peter of Greece and Denmark, “Tibetan Oracles”, in \textit{Himalayan anthropology: the Indo-Tibetan interface} (James F. Fisher ed.) World anthropology, vol. 35, W. de Gruyter, 1978, p. 287-298 ; T. Ngodup, F. Bottereau-Gardey and L. Deshayes \textit{Nechung, l'oracle du Dalaï-lama}, Presses de la Renaissance, Paris, 2009 ; B. ZOTZ, Zur europäischen Wahrnehmung von Besessenheitsphänomenen und Orakelwesen in Tibet, Vienna University, 2010.

\textsuperscript{27} W. Geoffrey Arnott op. cit. p. 155.

\textsuperscript{28} See n. 19 ; DM III,4 p. 130-131 : “Here is the greatest evidence: for many, even when fire is applied to them, are not burned, since the fire does not touch them on account of their divine inspiration. And many who are burned do not react, because at this time they are not living the life of an animate being. And some who are pierced with spits have no awareness of it, nor do others who are struck on the back with axes; still others whose arms are cut with knives do not feel it at all. Their actions are in no way human, because what is inaccessible
movements of the head, hyperventilation and most fascinatingly, a complete change of the facial features, corresponding to their loss of individuality and identity\textsuperscript{29}. As Apamea's master puts it, “those who are inspired have no consciousness of themselves\textsuperscript{30}” (οὐ παρακολουθοῦσιν ἑαυτοῖς ἐνθουσιῶντες): they literally, yet temporarily, self-dissolve.

However, just like Iamblichus would differentiate personal and popular divination from official oracles, modern research differentiates the first category of the pavo (dpa.' bo) from the Tibetan State Oracle\textsuperscript{31}. Iamblichus's description of the oracle's withdrawal from mundane matters is also strikingly similar to that of the Tibetan kuden (receiving body of the god) who sought physical and mental purification several days before each consultation through ritual acts, having “consecrated water poured over his head while mantras were chanted”\textsuperscript{32}:

καὶ πρὸ τοῦ πίνειν δὲ οὕτως ἄστει τὴν ἡμέραν ὅλην καὶ νύκτα, καὶ ἐν ιεροῖς τοὺς ἀβάτοις τῷ πλῆθει καθ’ ἑαυτὸν ἀνακεχώρηκεν ἀρχόμενος ἐνθουσιῶν, καὶ διὰ τῆς ἀποστάσεως καὶ ἀπαλλαγῆς τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων πραγμάτων ἑαυτὸν εἰς ὑποδοχὴν τοῦ θεοῦ παρασκευάζει· ἐξ ὧν δὴ εἰς καθαρὰν ἐξήραν τῆς ἑαυτοῦ ψυχῆς ἐλλάμπουσαν ἔχει τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ ἐπίπνοιαν, ἀκώλυτόν τε αὐτῇ παρέχει τὴν κατοκωχήν καὶ τὴν παρουσίαν τελείαν ἀνεμπόδιστον\textsuperscript{33}.

Even before drinking, he fasts the whole day and night, and after becoming divinely inspired, he withdraws by himself to sacred, inaccessible places, and by this withdrawal and separation from human affairs, he purifies himself for receiving the god; and through these means, he has the inspiration of god illuminating becomes accessible under divine possession: they cast themselves into fire and they walk through fire, and they walk over rivers like the priestess at Kastabala.” For a phenomenological modern approach of trance, see L.C Peters, D. Price-Williams, “A Phenomenological Overview of Trance.” (1983), Transcultural Psychiatric Research Review, 20(1), p. 5-39.

30 Ibid.
33 DM III,11 p. 146-147.
the pure sanctuary of his own soul, and providing for it an unhindered divine possession, and a perfect and unimpeded presence.

This supra-noetic state of consciousness, which seems to be paradoxically enough the very dissolution of self-consciousness, needs to be ritually anticipated according to Iamblichus, for the soul to undergo all the levels of being before achieving its final union with the deity.

In order to strengthen his concordist project of harmonization between all pagan cults, Iamblichus provides them with a common metaphysical ground. When institutional oracles were losing their adepts, Iamblichus tried to rehabilitate them, one by one, insisting on the fact that "foreknowledge and forecasting are not the province of a power exerting sympathetic influence or of something enmeshed in matter and held fast in a specific place and body, but, on the contrary it is characteristic of a power that is freed from all these." Now that we have introduced Iamblichus's general theory of divination, we shall focus on the case of hydromancy for the theological and metaphysical issues it involves.

34 If this project is usually associated with Proclus (cf. H.D Saffrey, “Accorder entre elles les traditions théologiques : une caractéristique du néoplatonisme athénien”, in On Proclus and his influence in Medieval Philosophy, ed. E.P Bos and P.A Meijer, Leiden, 1992, p. 35-50) there are solid arguments that lead us to think of Iamblichus as a forerunner, which concord with the description Julian the Emperor gave of him as “the savior of the whole pagan world”. In his De Mysteriis, Iamblichus indeed not only asserts that there is a philosophical symphonia between Orpheus, Hermes Trismegistus, Pythagoras and Plato, but also a religious and theologic harmony supported by a common metaphysical system between mystery cults, divination, its two categories (inspired or technical) and their various types (oracles, dream divination, signs interpretation) ; Chaldean theurgy and Egyptian religion.


36 DM III,22 p. 177. Ου γὰρ συμπαθῶς δυνάμεως οὐδ’ ἐνύλου καὶ κατεχομένης ἐν τινὶ τόπῳ καὶ σώματι τὸ προγιγνώσκειν τε καὶ προμηνύειν τὸ μέλλον, ἀλλὰ τούναντιν τῆς ἀπὸ πάντων τούτων ἀπολελυμένης.
Hydromancy: towards the oracle of Apollo Clarius at Colophon

It is no coincidence that the first actual and official oracle Iamblichus analyzes is that of Claros in Colophon\textsuperscript{37}, on the coast of Ionia, which was best known for its hydromantic tradition. Just like the two Juliani who had achieved a rain miracle during Marcus-Aurelius's military campaign on the Danube, Iamblichus himself seems to have had a specific bond with hydromancy, since we learn through Eunapius that he had performed such a ritual in Gadara's hot springs. As a matter of fact, Iamblichus had summoned there two water genies from the spring bed, Eros and Anteros\textsuperscript{38}, a passage written in a hagiographical style which deserves our attention:

As they had decided to head towards Gadara (…), they reached it at the best season of the year. Iamblichus was taking a bath, and so were his disciples, who were still insisting on the same subject. Smiling, Iamblichus told them “I have a religious apprehension to show you my powers, however, this shall happen for you.” He therefore asked his disciples to investigate the old name of the two smallest but prettiest springs. When they had fulfilled this command, they said: “Although these


people don't know why, they call the first one Eros, and the second Anteros.” Iamblichus touched the water with his finger – he was sitting on the side of the spring, where water overflows – after he pronounced a short spell, and invoked in this way a young boy from the depth. His skin was white, he had golden hair (…) and was moderately tall. He looked as if he had just bathed. Facing his disciples' surprise, Iamblichus said: “let's go to the next spring,” as he stood up and began walking in a focused way. There, when he had fulfilled the same magical operations, he invoked another Eros similar to the first one in all except that his hair was black and shining like the sun. Together, these two boys were holding him in their arms like they would have behaved with a real father. However he returned each one of them to their own spring, and (…) went away after he bathed.

Interestingly enough, this is the only testimony we are able to rely on regarding Iamblichus's miracles, although it seemed to have been a magical, and not theurgical operation here, but also an association of Syrian and Greek mythology. Although these two figures seem to belong to Syrian popular religion's genies, one shall not forget that Eros and Anteros are first and foremost Aphrodite's and Ares's sons. According to the *Phaedrus* 39, Anteros is nothing but aswered love, the mirror reflection of the lover's feelings. In Eunapius's testimony, both Erotes arise from water, primordial element of indifferenciation, once Iamblichus has invoked them with συνθήματα 40, sacred words endowed with operative power. This alleged miracle might have been one of the reasons why Apamea's philosopher was revered as ὁ θεῖος Ἰαμβλιχος. Since he was publically recognized as a philosopher able to perform the demiurgical act of differenciation, primeval matter's

39 Plato, *Phaedrus*, 255e. “It is as if he had caught an eye disease from someone else, but could not identify the cause; he does not realize that he is seeing himself in the lover as in a mirror. So when the lover is near, the boy's pain is relieved just as the lover's is, and when they are apart he yearns as much as he is yearned for, because he has a mirror image of love in him – returned love.” (καὶ οὔθ᾽ ὅτι πέπονθεν οἶδεν οὔδ᾽ ἔχει φράσαι, ἀλλ᾽ οἶδον ἀπ᾽ ἄλλου ὄφθαλμιας ἀπολελάυκω τό ἔρως προφαίρεσθι εἰπεῖν οὐκ ἔχει, ὡςπερ δὲ ἐν κατόπτρῳ ἐν τῷ ἔρωτι ἐαυτὸν ὄρον λέληθεν. Καὶ ὅταν μὲν ἐκείνος παρῇ, λήγει κατὰ ταύτα ἐκείνῳ τῆς ὀδύνης, ὅταν δὲ ἀπῆ, κατὰ ταύτα ἀνθρωπία καὶ ποθεῖται, εἴδωλον ἔρωτας ἀντέρωτα ἔχον·)

40 Cf. DM I,12 p. 53 : “The sacred names (όνόματα θεῶν) of the gods and the other types of divine symbol (θεία συνθήματα) that have the capacity of raising us up to the gods are enabled to link us to them.”, and also I,21 p. 81 ; II,11 p. 115 ; III,14 p. 155 ; III,15 p. 157 ; IV,2 p. 207 ; VI,6 p. 287 ; VIII,1 p. 291.
reception (χώρα\(^41\)) of two opposite (ἐναντίοι) yet sympathetic forms\(^42\), Iamblichus would indeed include himself in the priest-king Sampsigerami dynasty who ruled over Emesa. In this magical operation, water seems to contain within itself all virtual δύναμι, while playing the role of a mirror in Eros's fundamental loneliness.

Although it is a πνεῦμα made of immaterial fire\(^43\) which descends upon the prophet, water, along with light in φωτός ἄγωγή or φωταγωγία\(^44\), seems to be the main natural means of divination in most of the declining official oracles of the Late Roman Empire, which justifies that Iamblichus addresses it:

Τὸ δὴ ἐν Κολοφῶνι μαντεῖον ὁμολογεῖται παρὰ πᾶσι δι' ὕδατος χρηματίζειν. Εἶναι γὰρ πηγὴν ἐν οἴκῳ καταγείῳ καὶ ἀπ' αὐτῆς πίνειν τὸν προφήτην ἐν τισι τακταῖς νυξίν, ἱερουργιῶν πολλῶν


42 See G. SHAW, *Theurgy and the Soul* op. cit. p. 124 for Eros's function in the reunification of the soul as the divine's experience of genuine separation.

43 DM III, 6 p. 133. Τὸ δὲ μέγιστον ὁρᾶται τῷ θεαγωγοῦντι τὸ κατιόν πνεῦμα καὶ εἰσκρινόμενον, ὅσον τέ ἐστι καὶ ὁποῖον· μυστικῶς τε πείθεται καὶ διακυβερνᾶται. "Όραται δὲ καὶ τῷ δεχομένῳ τὸ τοῦ πυρὸς εἶδος πρὸ τοῦ δέχεσθαι· ἐνίοτε δὲ καὶ τοῖς θεωροῦσι πᾶσιν ἐκδηλῶν γίγνεται, ἣτοι κατιόντος ἢ ἄναχωροῦντος τοῦ θεοῦ· (But it is most important that the spirit descending and entering is seen by the medium, both in its extent and its quality; and that he is mystically obedient to and directed by it. The form of fire is seen by the recipient before the reception; and sometimes it even becomes conspicuous to all the spectators, durinng either the descent or the withdrawal of the god.)

44 DM III,14 p. 155. According to Dillon, φωταγωγία was a way to make divine beings visible through light shining or water, since higher beings were made of immaterial light, that could reveal itself through water used as a mirror. See PGM IV 955 and 1103. See also E.R Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, University of California Press, 1951, p. 299 for discussion on that fascinating divinatory tradition that may be related to the *Chaldean Oracles* on the one hand, and to a minoan astronomical ritual on the other hand. A calendar regulator made of an alabaster bowl was embedded in he darkest part of the floor in Knossos's Central Palace Sanctuary, placed such that sunrise in the morning of the equinoxes would shine on the northern side of the of the door and strike the bowl. See M. Blomberg and G. Henriksson, "Minoan Astronomy " (p. 1431-1441) p. 1435 in ed. C. N. Ruggles *Handbook of Archeoastronomy and Ethnoastronomy*, Springer, New-York, 2014.
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γενομένων πρότερον, πίοντα δὲ χρησμωδεῖν οὐκέθ’ ὁρόμενον τοῖς παρούσι θεωροῖς. Τὸ μὲν οὐν εἶναι μαντικον ἐκεῖνο τὸ ὕδωρ αὐτόθεν πρόδηλον τὸ δὲ πῶς ἐστι τοιοῦτον, οὐκέτ’ ἃν, κατὰ τὴν παροιμίαν, πάς ἀνὴρ γνοῖν ὃκεὶ μὲν γὰρ διήκειν τί δ’ αὐτοῦ πνεῦμα μαντικόν οὐ μέντοι τὸ γε ἀληθὲς οὕτως ἔχει. Τὸ γὰρ θεῖον οὐ διασφαίρισθηκεν οὔτω διαστατῶς καὶ μεριστῶς ἐν τοῖς αὐτοῦ μετέχουσιν, ἀλλ’ ὃς παρέχον ἔξωθεν καὶ ἐπιλάμπον τὴν πηγήν, πληροὶ δυνάμεως αὐτήν ἀφ’ ἕαυτοῦ μαντικῆς οὐ μέντοι τοῦ γε θεοῦ πᾶσα ἔστιν ἥ ἐπίπνοια ήντα παρέχει τὸ ὕδωρ, ἀλλ’ αὕτη μὲν ἐπιτηδειότητα μόνον καὶ ἀποκάθαρσιν τοῦ ἐν ἡμῖν αὐγοειδοῦς πνεύματος ἐμποιεῖ, δι’ ἣν δυνατοὶ γιγνόμεθα χωρεῖν τὸν θεόν.

It is agreed by everyone that the oracle at Colophon prophesies by means of water (δι’ ὕδατος χρηματίζειν). There is a spring in a subterranean chamber (πηγὴν ἐν οἴκῳ καταγείῳ), and from it the prophet drinks on certain appointed nights, after performing many preliminary ceremonies, and after drinking, he delivers his oracles, no longer seen by the spectators present (θεωροῖς). That this water has oracular (μαντικὸν) power is immediately obvious. It seems that some prophetic spirit (πνεῦμα μαντικὸν) passes through the water; but this is not correct, for the divine does not permeate what partakes in a fragmented and divided manner (διαστατῶς καὶ μεριστῶς), but it is by exercising its power from without (ἐξωθεν), and illuminating the spring, that it fills it with its own prophetic power. Still, not every inspiration that the water gives is from the god, but this only bestows the receptivity and purification (ἐπιτηδειότητα καὶ ἀποκάθαρσιν) of the luminous spirit (αὐγοειδοῦς πνεύματος) in us, through which we are able to receive the god (χωρεῖν τὸν θεόν). But the presence of the god is different from and prior to this, and flashes like lightning from above⁴⁶.

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⁴⁶ De Mysteriis III,11 p. 147.
The first step of Iamblichus's demonstration is to concede that prophecy indeed occurs through the means of water in Claros, a testimony consistent with Tacitus's description of the oracle. However, if he acknowledges that this water has “oracular power”, Iamblichus refuses to assert that it would actually be divinatory in itself.

As a matter of fact, if he were to accept water's divinatory power, Iamblichus would assert that the causes of divination are natural, and therefore not divine, a hypothesis he needs to dismiss by all means to strengthen paganism's legitimacy. In order to support his claim of a fully supernatural cause in divination, he declares that no πνεῦμα μαντικὸν passes through water, before justifying it through his theory of the unity of the divine. To put it otherwise, if the divine πνεῦμα was conducted by water, divine power would be divided and separated. Yet the power of the gods is one according to Iamblichus, and as such, it should act uniformly.

"Αχώριστος μὲν γὰρ οὕσα τῆς φύσεως τῶν τόπων καὶ τῶν ύποκειμένων αὐτῆς σωμάτων ή τοιαύτη δύναμις, ή προϊόσσα κατὰ κίνησιν τῆς ἄφορισιμον ἀρίθμῳ, σὲ δύναται τὰ πανταχοῦ καὶ ἀεὶ προιγνώσκειν ὡσαύτως. ἀφειμένη δὲ ἀπόλυτος τῶν τόπων καὶ τῶν διαμεμετρημένων τοῖς ἀριθμοῖς χρόνων (ὅτε δὴ κρείττων οὖσιν) παντοτε ἄμα σύνεστιν, ἐν ἑνὶ τε συνείληθε τῶν ὅλων τῆς ἀληθείας διὰ τὴν ἑαυτῆς ὑπερέχουσαν οὐσίαν.

Such a power, if inseparable from the nature of places and of bodies subject to it, or preceded by a motion limited by number, cannot know beforehand things everywhere and always in the same manner. But if separate and free from places and times measured by number (since it is superior to things happening in time and held in place) it is equally present with beings wherever they are, and is always at the same time present with those growing in time, and embraces in one the truth of all existing things because of its own separate and superior essence (ὑπερέχουσαν οὐσίαν).

47 In Ann. II, 54, Tacitus also reports that the oracle used to go down to a cave before drinking sacred water from a spring.

48 De Mysteriis, III, 12 p. 151.
Through the case of water in the hydromantic oracle of Colophon, Iamblichus wishes to reconcile two priorities of his metaphysical system: 1) the transcendence of the divine, and 2) its omnipresence and therefore, immanence.

To that effect, he achieves a *tour de force* in trying to demonstrate the divine's immanence as the very consequence of its transcendence. Although it may first appear as a *contradictio in terminis*, Iamblichus states that the divine “embraces in one the truth of all existing things because of its own separate and superior essence (ὑπερέχουσα οὐσία)\(^{49}\). Not only does he support that there is no contradiction between these two assumptions, but he also asserts that there is a causal relationship between these two opposed characteristics. If the divine was not transcendent, it would not be able to encompass all existing things from without, Iamblichus argues.

However, to avoid the weakness of this contradiction Porphyry might have attacked, he has to point it out himself, and make it clear through a clear statement: the divine “both illuminates from without and fills all things”. We may find an argument for this statement in the first part of this treatise: according to Iamblichus, the divine is beyond λόγος, and especially διάνοια. Accusing Porphyry of being a rationalist even when it comes to theology – that is to say, a blasphemer, he writes:

σὺ δ’ ἐξικας ἡγεῖσθαι τὴν αὐτὴν εἶναι τῶν θείων καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ὀποιωνοῦν γνῶσιν, δίδοσθαι τε ἀπὸ τῶν ἀντικειμένων τὸ ἔτερον μόριον, ὥσπερ εἰσὶ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἐν ταῖς διαλέκτοις προτεινομένων τὸ δ’ οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδαμῶς παραπλήσιον ἐξήλλακται γὰρ αὐτῶν ἡ εἰδησις, ἀντιθέσεως τε πάσης κεχώρισται.

You, however, seem to think that knowledge of divinity is of the same nature as a knowledge of anything else, and that it is by the balancing of contrary propositions that a conclusion is reached, as in dialectical discussions. But the cases are in no way similar. The knowledge of the gods is of a quite different nature, and is far removed from all antithetical procedure (ἀντιθέσεως τε πάσης κεχώρισται)\(^{50}\).

Indeed, if the divine, as a hypercosmic reality encompassing the cosmos, exists beyond the aristotelian law of non-contradiction, it can

\(^{49}\) *De Mysteriis*, III 12 p. 151.

\(^{50}\) DM I,3 p.15.
be both transcendent and immanent, Iamblichus argues. Moreover, since the gods' oracular power is prior to everything (πρὸ τῶν ὅλων προϋπάρχουσα), all living and non-living beings on Earth shall share in it (μετέχειν).

In hydromancy's case, Iamblichus intends to solve this dianoetical difficulty by arguing that divine power, whereas it fills all things, “illuminates the spring from without” and “flashes from above” like lighting. And although he acknowledges, just like Plotinus that “the universe is a single living being”, and that Earth has received a part of the divine, Iamblichus refuses to identify matter with the divine itself. Both matter and nature partake in the divine, without being confused with it, but are nonetheless divinized through μετουσία. Furthermore, if no part of the soul remained above, nature has logically to be the very first step of theurgical ascent.

This doctrine justifies the religious use of natural elements in both theurgical rituals and μαντική, because both respect the laws of cosmological συμπάθεια. Since water partakes in the divine, as everything in nature, it is used in divination without threatening it of becoming a natural phenomenon.

This Iamblichean concept of nature understood as a receptacle of the divine, just as it is a receptacle of the forms, justifies his view of a simultaneously transcendent and immanent noetic principle. For if the divine was only transcendent, nature would be deprived of it, and so would we, forever unable to achieve our souls' union with superior principles or beings - locked in an earthly prison.

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